

Al Ihsaan

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Source: An Explanation of the Three Principles

Al-Ihsaan is the opposite of behaving badly, and it means that a person strives to do what is good and to repel harmful things. So he strives to benefit the servants of Allaah through his wealth, position, knowledge and his person.

So as for the case of doing good with ones wealth, then he spends and gives in charity, and pays the zakaat, and the best of the types of doing good through wealth is the zakaat since it is one of the pillars of Islaam, and one of its great foundations. A person's Islaam will not be complete without it. It is the charity most loved by Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, and that is followed by that which it is obligatory upon a person to spend upon his wife, mother, father, children, brothers, children of his brothers, sisters, paternal uncles, paternal aunts, maternal aunts, and so on. Then by charity given to the poor and to the rest of those deserving of charity - such as students of knowledge for example.

As for the case of doing good by means of ones position, then it is that people are found in different levels. Some of them have status with someone in authority and so strive to benefit the people by means of his position. So if a man comes to him and requests that he should intercede for him with the one in authority then he does so, either to repel some harm from him or to attain some good for him.

As for doing good by means of his knowledge, then it is that he strives to pass on his knowledge to Allaah's servants, in open and private gatherings and assemblies. Even if people sit socially, to drink coffee, then it pertains to good and fine behaviour that he should teach the people. Even if you are in a public gathering it is from what is good that you teach the people. However wisdom is to be used in this matter. So you should not weary the people making it a habit that every single time you sit in a gathering you admonish and address the people, since the Prophet used to give them admonition now and then, and not too frequently. This is because the souls become weary and bored. When they become bored they become languid and weak and may even come to dislike what is good merely because of the frequency with which the person stands and addresses them.

As for seeking to benefit the people with ones person, then the Prophet (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

"... that you help a man to mount and ride his riding beast, or you lift up his luggage on to it for him, is a charity." (Reported by al-Bukhaaree, Eng. Trans. 4/90-94/No. 161 & Muslim, Eng. Trans. 2/483-484/ No. 2204).

So you help this man to carry his luggage, or you guide him to the correct road to take and so on, all of this pertains to ihsaan. So this is with regard to striving to do good to the servants of Allaah.

As for ihsaan in the worship of Allaah, then it is that you worship Allaah as if you were seeing Him, as the Prophet (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said. So worship done in this way that a person worships his Lord as if he were actually seeing Him is worship that is accompanied by yearning and seeking. So a person will find

that his soul encourages him upon worship done in this way, since he is yearning for the one he loves. Therefore he worships Him as if he were seeing Him, and he directs his heart to Him and turns to Him and seeks to draw near to Him, He the One free of all imperfections and the Most High.

"Then even though you do not see Him, then He certainly sees you." This part shows worship done whilst fleeing and fearing, and is therefore the second level of ihsaan. So if you do not worship Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, as if you are seeing Him and seeking Him and your soul is encouraging you towards Him, then worship Him keeping in mind that He sees you. So you will then worship Him as one who fears Him and seeks to flee from His retribution and punishment.

This level is held by those having knowledge of these affairs to be lower than the first level. Worship of Allaah, the Perfect and Most High, is, as Ibn al-Qayyim said: "Worship of the Most Merciful is utmost love of Him, along with the worshipper's submission and humility, they are its two pillars."

So worship is built upon these two matters: utmost love, and utmost humility and submission. Love causes one to desire and seek, and humility causes one to fear and flee. This is ihsaan in the worship of Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic. If a person worships Allaah in this manner, then he will become one who is pure and sincere in his worship of Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic. He will not desire with his worship that he is seen by the people, or heard of, nor will he desire their praise. It will be the same to him whether the people notice him or do not notice him.

He will worship with ihsaan in every condition. Indeed part of the completion of purity and sincerity of worship (al-ikhlaas) is that a person should seek not to be seen by the people when he worships, and that his worship should be a secret between him and his Lord. That is unless there is some benefit for the Muslims or for Islaam in his performing it openly, for example if he is a person who is followed and taken as an example and he wishes to manifest his worship to the people so that they should take it as an example to follow; or that he manifests his worship so that his companions, friends and associates should follow his example, then this is good. This benefit which he takes account of may be more excellent and greater than the benefit of keeping it hidden. Therefore, Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, has praised those who spend of their wealth in charity secretly and openly. So whenever performing it secretly is better and more beneficial for the heart, and causes one to be more humble and submissive, and to turn to Allaah more attentively, then they give in secret. But when performing it openly produces benefit for Islaam, due to manifestation of its prescribed practices, and will mean that the people follow this person's example, then they do this openly.

The Believer looks to what is most appropriate. So whatever is most appropriate and most beneficial in worship, then it will be what is most complete and most excellent.